

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04

NSAE-00 SIL-01 PA-01 PRS-01 USIA-06 /040 W

----- 117405

R 202019Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6862

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PLAB, FR

SUBJECT: PC ORGANIZES SHORT-LIVED STRIKE IN RENAULT

1. SUMMARY. RECENT STRIKE ACTIONS IN RENAULT PLANT IN BILLANCOURT EMPLOYING 30,000 WORKERS CREATED A FLEETING SCARE IN VIEW OF RENAULT'S RECORD AS PACE-SETTER AND SOCIAL BAROMETER BUT, MORE IMPORTANT, THREW NEW LIGHT ON PC-PS CONFLICT AND RAISED AGAIN QUESTIONS ABOUT CURRENT PC-CGT RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. ON 13 FEB SOME 350 WORKERS SUPPLYING PARTS TO ASSEMBLY LINES (CARISTES) STRUCK DEMANDING SAME CLASSIFICATION AS ASSEMBLY LINE OPERATORS IN THE NAME OF "EQUAL WORK EQUAL PAY". STRIKE CAUSED IMMEDIATELY THE LAYOFF OF 4000 WORKERS. MOST SURPRISING ASPECT OF THIS STRIKE, AS TOLD TO US BY RENAULT OFFICIAL AND HAD IT CONFIRMED BY JOURNALIST WITH DIRECT ACCESS TO PCF, WAS THAT IT WAS FOMENTED NOT BY CGT OR ANY OTHER UNION BUT BY THE PCF ACTING THROUGH ITS RENAULT CELL. CGT AND OTHER UNIONS DID NOT COME INTO PICTURE UNTIL MANAGEMENT CALLED FOR NEGOTIATIONS. WHAT STRUCK RENAULT MANAGEMENT WAS THAT THE PCF TACTICS AND SLOGANS IN THIS INSTANCE WERE REMINISCENT OF EARLIER DAY "GAUCHISTE" AGITATION AND REVOLUTIONARY RHETORIC. IT WILL BE RECALLED THAT AT THAT TIME PCF WAS TIRELESS CASTIGATOR OF SUCH "GAUCHISTE" ACTIONS AND FOUGHT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THEM WITH UNDISGUISED FEROCITY.

3. IN LIGHT OF FOREGOING RENAULT MANAGEMENT MADE QUICK DECISION TO DIFFUSE SITUATION BY ACCEPTING IMMEDIATELY STRIKERS' DEMANDS FOR RECLASSIFICATION. FURTHERMORE, FEARING THAT PCF MAY NOT STOP THERE OR THAT CARISTES' STRIKE MAY BECOME CONTAGIOUS, RENAULT ACTED WITH EQUAL SWIFTNESS IN GRANTING A SPECIAL PREMIUM TO ALL WORKERS AS AN ADVANCE TO ANY WAGE ADJUSTMENTS TO RESULT FROM REALIGNMENT OF CLASSIFICATIONS NEGOTIATIONS FOR WHICH WERE SET FOR 18 MARCH.

4. FOLLOWING ACCEPTANCE OF MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS, OPERATIONS RETURNED TO NORMAL ON 17 FEB ONLY TO BE DISRUPTED AGAIN ON 18 AND 19 FEB BY SHORT WORK STOPPAGES IN VARIOUS SHOPS INVOLVING SMALL NUMBER OF WORKERS HOLDING KEY JOBS. IN CONTRAST TO 13 FEB EXPERIENCE, THE NEW STRIKES SEEM TO BE THE RESULT OF ANTICIPATED CONTAGION (WORKERS INVOKING EQUAL WORK EQUAL PAY PRINCIPLE TO JUSTIFY RECLASSIFICATION DEMANDS) OR RESURGENCE OF GAUCHISTE MOVEMENT. IN ONE SHOP (NO. 35) KNOWN AS "GAUCHISTE", PC AND CGT DELEGATES WERE LITERALLY THROWN OUT OF THE SHOP WHEN THEY ATTEMPTED TO ADDRESS THE STRIKERS.

5. IN EFFORT TO RESTORE STRIKERS' CONTACT WITH REALITY, RENAULT MANAGEMENT THREATENED TO CLOSE ENTIRE PLANT IF STRIKE HARASSMENT DID NOT STOP.

6. FROM THE BEGINNING CGT AND OTHER UNIONS REACTED WITH ILL CONCEALED APPREHENSION. IN PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS WITH MANAGEMENT AND REPORTERS THEY RECOGNIZED ABSURDITY OF STRIKE ACTION IN AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY AT A TIME WHEN IT IS UNDERGOING WORLD-WIDE CRISIS. ENCOURAGED BY COMPANY'S QUICK CONCESSIONS' UNIONS AND ESPECIALLY CGT ARE DOING EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO BRING SITUATION UNDER THEIR CONTROL AND KEEP WORKERS ON THE JOB. THE GENERAL EXPECTATION IS THAT THEY WILL SUCCEED BUT RESIDUAL "GAUCHISTE" MOVEMENT AND RIVALRIES BETWEEN VARIOUS WORKSHOPS ARE SERIOUS OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME.
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7. RENAULT SITUATION IS OBVIOUSLY INTRIGUING. FIRST, THE FLEETING SCARE IT CAUSED CONFIRMED AGAIN THE PROMINENT POSITION RENAULT HAS HELD AS PACESETTER OF LABOR DEVELOPMENTS AND A BAROMETER OF SOCIAL CLIMATE.

8. SECOND, IT REVEALED HOW URGENTLY AND HOW FAR PCF LEADERS ARE PREPARED TO GO TO REASSERT REVOLUTIONARY

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AND MILITANT IMAGE AND RAISON D'ETRE OF THEIR PARTY
WHICH THEY FEEL WERE UNDERMINED BY CLOSE ALLIANCE
THEY HAD PRACTICED WITH PS.

9. THIRD, PCF'S DIRECT INTERVENTION IN RENAULT MAY
BE A CLUE TO A DIVERGENCE OF VIEWS AND STRATEGY THAT
MIGHT HAVE DEVELOPED BETWEEN CGT AND PCF BECAUSE OF
THE DIFFERENT COMPOSITION OF THEIR RESPECTIVE MEMBER-
SHIP. FOR THE PCF THE INTEGRITY OF THE PARTY AS A
REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT AND ITS AMBITION TO BE EX-
CLUSIVE OCCUPANT OF ENTIRE TERRITORY OF LEFT OPPOSITION
COME AHEAD OF ANY OTHER POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS. FOR
THE CGT, HOWEVER, WHOSE MEMBERSHIP IS COMPOSED OF NO
MORE THAN 10 PERCENT PCF MEMBERS AND 60 PERCENT
SOCIALIST PARTY ELECTORS, A RIGID AND ORTHODOX STANCE
SUCH AS IS NOW ASSUMED BY PCF REPRESENTS A MAJOR RISK.
SUCH A STANCE MAY WELL ALIENATE THE NON-COMMUNIST CGT
MEMBERS AND DRIVE THOSE WHO ARE ALREADY OR POTENTIAL
PS MEMBERS TO QUIT CGT AND JOIN CFDT OR FO. AN
ANALYSIS SIMILAR TO FOREGOING HAS LED A RECENT
ARTICLE IN "NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR" TO CONCLUSION THAT
CGT MAY BE LESS INCLINED THAN IN THE PAST TO PLAY
TRADITIONAL ROLE OF TRANSMISSION BELT OF PCF ORDERS

AND SLOGANS. THIS CONCLUSION SEEMS EXCESSIVE IF
NOT TOTALLY UNREALISTIC. HOWEVER, WE DO BELIEVE THAT
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THE POTENTIAL FOR A CONFLICT BETWEEN CGT AND PCF
ON THEIR ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION AND THEIR
RESPECTIVE ROLES EXISTS AND BEARS WATCHING.

10. BACK TO STRIKE SITUATION, WE BELIEVE RENAULT
MAY WELL BE VICTIM OF ITS EXTRAORDINARY SUCCESS IN
WEATHERING THE "AUTOMOBILE CRISIS" AS EVIDENCED BY
UNINTERRUPTED PRODUCTION WITHOUT LAYOFFS OR REDUCED
WORK SCHEDULES. UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES RENAULT WORKERS
ALLOWED THEMSELVES TO FALL INTO ILLUSION OF JOB
SECURITY AND ABILITY TO RESUME TRADE UNION ACTIONS
AS USUAL. UNION LEADERS, HOWEVER, GIVE EVIDENCE
THAT THEY KNOW BETTER.

STONE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY, LABOR STRIKES, LABOR UNIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 20 FEB 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: MorefiRH
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975PARIS04541
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750061-0436
From: PARIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750227/aaaaayhr.tel
Line Count: 191
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: MorefiRH
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 13 MAY 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <13 MAY 2003 by ifshinsr>; APPROVED <13 MAY 2003 by MorefiRH>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PC ORGANIZES SHORT-LIVED STRIKE IN RENAULT
TAGS: ELAB, FR, RENAULT
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006